the enemy of every tribe: "bushman" images in Northern Athapaskan narratives

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In the winter of 1972, the members of a zoological expedition to the Arun Valley of Nepal camped for the night on a remote alpine slope in a snowfield located at about twelve thousand feet altitude. After sleeping undisturbed through the night, they were startled to find upon rising a strange set of footprints inside the camp. In the words of Edward Cronin, a wildlife biologist in the party, "while we were sleeping, a creature had approached our camp and walked directly between our tents. The Sherpa identified the tracks without question as *yeti* footprints" (Cronin 1975:32). Like many Himalayan explorers before him (including Sir Edmund Hillary), Cronin received this explanation with mixed feelings of skepticism and hope—hope that here at last was positive evidence that would lead him to the mysterious Abominable Snowman. For the next three years he devoted major efforts to searching for this notoriously elusive creature.

Dr. Cronin's fascination with the *yeti* is characteristic, I think, of the more imaginative set of learned responses to concepts of wild, humanlike creatures found throughout the world. Natural scientists intrigued with the possibility of discovering new, unrecorded species find such beliefs especially appealing, particularly if they search for missing links (in Cronin's case, the search is for a surviving population of Gigantopithecus, the Pleistocene hominid). But whether they occur in the Himalayas, in Europe, or, as with the legendary *sasquatch* (Big Foot), among people on the Northwest Coast of the North American continent, acceptance of beliefs in such beings is linked to the suggestion that they are circumstantial evidence of an external reality, of relict hominid species that might possibly still survive in the wilderness regions of the world.

Consequently, more restrained (or less poetically inclined) observers have responded to such interpretations by debunking the existence of any such objective reality. The beliefs themselves are invalidated and relegated to a category of ideas—not far from the notion of "primitive superstition"—said to be caused by an alleged ignorance and therefore fear of so-called "true" causes of events in the natural world. Most anthropological interpretations

A variety of "bushman" images are found throughout the Northern Athapaskan area. They have been typically characterized as supernatural beliefs arising in response to fears of dangers in the natural and social environments and to ignorance of true causes of events. I argue in this paper that an understanding of the images must also take into account the cultural and social systems that govern their creation and use in personal narratives. In particular, the images within one region, the central Mackenzie River valley, must be understood in terms of the focal concerns of seasonality, supernatural power, social relationships, and technology, as well as the explanatory uses to which the narratives are put.

are of this type and, at best, seek to explain (or more exactly, to rationalize) such concepts in terms of their latent—especially ecological and psychodynamic—functions. This has been typically the case of Windigo psychosis interpretations, for example (compare Bishop 1975).

Similarly, the earliest descriptions of a less well-known anthropomorphic image, the so-called "bushman" of Northern Athapaskan (Dene) culture[1] suggested that the concept was a childlike response to fears of dangers in the natural and social environments—of warlike enemies, starvation, and wild animals. Thus Emile Petitot, an Oblate missionary to the Hare and Great Bear Lake Indians wrote in 1876, "each year during the summer, a fear spreads among them in an epidemic and irrational fashion. They live at that time in continual terror, in fear of an imaginary enemy who pursues them without rest and who they believe to see everywhere even though he doesn't exist at all" (Petitot 1876:xxi). This interpretation has not been restricted to missionaries convinced of the superiority of Christian thought. In 1959, Cornelius Osgood, a major figure in subarctic ethnography, wrote of the Ingalik belief in "bushmen," "the strength of this figure results because of the sometimes latent, sometimes unconscious and almost paralyzing fear of the dangers in the woods that a few Indians have most of the time, and almost every Indian once in a while" (Osgood 1959:166). As recently as 1974, James VanStone repeated McKennan's (1959) assertion that the Northern Athapaskan "bushman" concept "appears to involve a deep-rooted fear of an evil spirit, an anxiety shared by everyone. Such a concept fits readily into a belief system [VanStone concluded] the very essence of which is the placation of spirits" (VanStone 1974:64).

There is no doubt that people who live in especially harsh environments accord unusual respect to their habitats and take great care in dealing with them. They would certainly be foolish to do otherwise. So it is indeed plausible to suggest that concepts of dangerous beings take much of their significance from how a people conceive their experience of living in such a setting. Yet the content of these images—how they are specifically defined, related to other images, and (perhaps most important), used in the course of social action—is invariably missing from these explanations. Why is there, in one area of the world for example, an anthropomorphic predator—the *yeti*—described as a hairy, pinheaded creature who lives a life complete with relatives, cozy hearths, and shared meals, while elsewhere, a similar predator—the bushman—is portrayed as a solitary, half-starved male? Even a cursory examination of these hominoid images suggests that they are extremely diverse and that a richness of conceptualization and functional utility must exist, despite their having been consigned to the much maligned category of "folklore" or "superstition."

Rather than submerge these anthropomorphic images in a haphazard collection labeled "supernatural beliefs" alleged both to reflect and (at the same time) to create anxiety and stress, a more fruitful approach is one that would examine their contexts of use as cultural symbols. In particular, because they seem often to be associated with descriptions of dangerous or even disastrous situations, it may be that they are embedded in broader notions of causality, and that the speech acts in which they appear can be taken to contain causal explanations of such situations. Such an approach is taken for the analysis of the Northern Athapaskan bushman image. An understanding of the bushman can best be accomplished by situating it in the various forms of cultural expression that people use to give that image meaning and that can themselves be understood only with reference to the cultural and social systems governing their creation and determining how they are to be used. These cultural forms—belonging to a type of oral genre I refer to as the "personal narrative"—serve complex and multiple functions in Northern Athapaskan societies. Focusing upon the texts of these narratives—on their symbolic structural content—is necessary but insufficient for a thorough understanding of these multiple functions. It is

only through an examination of the contexts in which people make use of the personal narrative, the narrator's motives, and the roles and relationships of speakers and listeners, that it is possible to appreciate the significance of the bushman both as a commentary on the various images of the self in Northern Athapaskan culture and as a symbol used in the construction of causal explanations.

"Bushman" narratives at Willow Lake

I first heard about bushmen (*náqą̀ne*) while I was camped with several Mountain Indians (*ʒút'agotíneke*) on the Keele River in the Mackenzie Mountains. One Sunday afternoon, seemingly for the sheer entertainment of it, the Indians began to tell stories of encounters with mysterious, solitary men who had sought to kidnap them while they were alone in the bush.[2] More of these incidents were related in the settlement of *k'áálǫ̀* ("willow tips," that is, Willow or Brackett Lake) to the east of the Mackenzie River,[3] where it became obvious to me that virtually every adult had a repertoire of such stories, and that perhaps they were not told solely for entertainment or to evoke a past history of violence and war (as it had originally seemed). Nor, it became clear, were bushmen to be thought of as simply another class of monstrous beings who appeared to unlucky hunters. On the contrary, the more I heard, the more it seemed likely that this figure had some special significance in Dene culture.

The people of Willow Lake (*k'áálǫ̀gotineke*) are one of several territorially defined groups that are at the present time associated with the trading settlement of Fort Norman, a town originally founded in 1805 by the Northwest Company and located on the Mackenzie River, about three hundred miles south of the Arctic Circle. Although they maintain houses at Fort Norman, for much of the year the thirty or so members of the Willow Lake group live in their bush settlement about twenty-five miles true north of the river. Here, they fish, hunt, and trap in a wilderness of spruce, larch, birch, willow, and numerous shallow lakes and streams that feed ultimately into the Arctic Ocean and the Mackenzie itself. Periodically, they return to Fort Norman to exchange their furs at the Hudson's Bay store for equipment and supplies they will need when they return to the bush to participate in Catholic ceremonies (especially around Christmas, Easter, and during early August), and, more recently, to assist at political meetings organized by the Indian Brotherhood of the Northwest Territories in response to the newly perceived need to formally codify Indian rights. At present, the use of skimobiles has facilitated travel during the winter, so that some individuals spend only two or three days at a time in the bush and actually reside during the harshest months at Fort Norman, where they can benefit from oil heat and water delivered by truck.

At Willow Lake, the chief means of moral and technological instruction is the narrative account. Accounts of historical events, trickster stories involving the dubious exploits of Raven, events in the cycle of a hero who slays monsters, and (especially) stories dealing with personal experiences (including traveling, hunting, and hospital experiences, descriptions of dreams, and incidents of starvation) contain not only vivid details of phenomena that have been experienced by others, but, more importantly, explanations and interpretations of such phenomena. In many instances, the stories contain exemplifications of social and individual behavioral choices in specific contexts; they suggest to listeners how they should—or should not—behave in particular situations and also provide teleological explanations for why individuals in the past behaved as they did, and causal explanations of crises and disasters.

Stories about Dene experiences in the bush contain much useful information about

phenomena that often vary considerably or that must be comprehended in the most minute detail; often the narratives are the only sources of such information. People are very much aware of this. For example, a man approximately forty years of age told me that he had learned to hunt moose by "listening to my grandfather talk about it," and an older woman (of about seventy) told me, "when people tell you a story, that means they are teaching you about something. When you listen, you will hear something that you can use. Keep it, and then you can use it when you need it." Education thus proceeds to a great extent (though not exclusively, of course) by means of listening to elaborate descriptions of events, environments, and the behavior of all manner of beings (including humans) in the world. Indeed, the burden falls upon individuals to narrate their experiences without being asked because it is inappropriate for adults to ask, or even suggest, that a person tell a story, just as it is inappropriate for one adult to ask another directly for anything. Thus, a hunter, successful or not, upon his return to camp sends for the other men who gather in a tipi or cabin to drink tea and listen to him relate his experiences in the bush. A person who has a dream immediately seeks out other people with whom the significance of the dream will be discussed (because dreams indicate the nature of a person's power and often predict the future, they are not taken lightly). In short, personal narratives should, indeed must, be told because they are the source of very precise and specialized information that—for the benefit of all—has to be shared by those who choose to live together. Indeed, the very survival of the group may depend upon this pooling of experience. The instructive and, in particular, explanatory function of personal narratives is therefore of great importance. Bushman narratives are no exceptions, in that they describe the characteristics of *náqʒne,* how a person might recognize them, how they signal their presence, what they do to people, and what one can do to prevent being victimized.

A related functional consequence of the telling of *náqʒne* stories is the socialization of children. Here, the goal is not so much social education as more immediate social control. By creating a climate of apprehension, use of the *náqʒne* image is particularly effective in keeping unruly children quiet and in causing them to remain close to camp. As one woman said, "we want them to think hard about how to live in the bush, even if we have to scare them sometimes." As a consequence, children often share bushman lore with each other.

While it serves to teach people about the behavior of an important phenomenon in their environment, the bushman narrative also assists in moral instruction. This is accomplished in several ways. The first is to deflect criticism from a known person onto the bushman, after some obviously morally ambivalent act has been performed. For example, it is interesting that in many narratives of bushman encounters, the initial state of isolation in which the victim is placed is caused by a serious violation of some social norm: a child is not properly watched, a hunter is alone in the bush during the spring, or a woman wanders away from her friends picking berries on the muskeg. In some accounts, the violation is coupled with a second one, as in the Ingalik story of a solitary hunter who ignored a warning from his own "power," or of the case of the Mountain man who, returning with meat from a solitary moose hunt (men are supposed to ask others in their camp to bring home the meat), brags that *náqʒne* cannot harm him. It may be suggested that in these cases the narrative that follows vividly suggests that the initial incident is due to bad behavior, as indicated by the disastrous consequences that result. At the same time, the story deflects criticism of the protagonist onto another person, namely, the bushman.

In similar fashion, the bushman image can be used more directly by a story teller in criticizing the behavior of some listener, as in the story of a man who, upon awakening violently and reaching for his gun, explained his antisocial behavior by saying he thought the person who had suddenly and without warning entered his house was a bushman. This explanation served to excuse his inappropriate gesture and at the same time indicated to

the visitor how wrong he had been to startle his friend in his sleep—that he (the visitor) was in fact acting like a bushman. Thus some narratives of bushmen encounters may be devices for the oblique chastisement of people who, inadvertently or not, have placed the protagonist in a situation of potential danger. The inadvertent nature of the initial act can be explained by the perception that bushmen often use their power to cause confusion before causing a disaster. The narrative thus describes not what has actually happened, but what might have happened if the protagonist had not been prepared for any contingency. The latter is itself a message about his special foresight. The speaker's intelligence is thus contrasted directly with the blundering behavior, often resulting in very serious consequences, of the person obliquely criticized.

Insofar as bushman narratives serve in oblique moral criticism, they have the effect of emphasizing the value of adhering to social standards, of justifying the necessity of conforming to contemporary ideals concerning behavior in situations of "bush life." The personal contextualization of problems and disasters further serves both to comment upon actual social relationships and roles in a particular community and to provide concrete examples of solutions to such problems. It is not so much that the image "cause(s) people to assert their solidarity," as the Kutchin ethnographer Richard Slobodin has suggested (1960), but that bushman narratives inform people of the enduring practical value of social solidarity—that this can indeed be a matter of life or death. It is perhaps for this reason that stories of bushman encounters, unlike descriptions of hunting experiences, dreams, events in the hospital, and encounters with ghosts or monsters, have entered oral tradition. They have a mythical quality (though probably do not persist as long as stories of a prior "age of monsters") because they can be told by any adult, even if he or she happens not to have been the protagonist, whereas this is not the case with other kinds of personal narratives. Yet it is apparent that the telling of bushmen stories is not merely the transmission of tradition but, as Bauman and Abrahams have suggested concerning verbal art in general, performances with specific communicative and social consequences (Bauman 1975; Abrahams 1972).

narrative pattern

Table 1 is a list of nineteen themes contained in sixty-two Northern Athapaskan narratives in which the bushman image appears. Thirty-eight of these were collected among the residents of Willow Lake; the remaining twenty-four are published stories from nine other groups: Kutchin (Keim 1964; Osgood 1936b; Slobodin 1960), Ingalik (Osgood 1959); Upper Tanaina (McKennan 1959); Koyukon or Ten'a (Jette 1911); Tanaina (Osgood 1937); Slave (MacNeish 1957; Honigmann 1946); Chipewyan (VanStone 1965); Kaska (Honigmann 1949); and Han (Osgood 1971). By far the greatest number refer to encounters with bushman (only sixteen of the sixty-two do not), and of these the most common encounters are those that are disastrous or at best highly threatening, in which individuals are either directly attacked or feel extremely vulnerable because of a bushman's presence. In most of the other cases (exceptions are theme 12 "sounds in the bush," and theme 11 "fights with a bushman") bushman encounters are relatively harmless or, as in theme 9, "killing of bushman," place the bushman at a decided disadvantage, and as a result he is killed before he ever has a chance to cause harm. The frequency of theme 2—"origins of bushman" is due to my own efforts to get people to explain the origin of these beings.

Table 2 illustrates the structure of narratives dealing with bushmen encounters of all types (Themes 1, 3-12, 14, 16, 18). In these cases, the stage invariably is set by the protagonist becoming isolated in the bush during the spring, summer, or early fall (but never in

Table 1. Themes in Northern Athabaskan "bushman" narratives.

I.		
	a) collected from residents at Willow (Brackett) Lake, N.W.T., 1973-1975:	38
	b) published accounts in literature on Northern Athabaskans:	24
		62

II.	*Total*	*Willow Lake*
1) theft of women:	10	3
2) origins of bushmen:	8	3
3) sighting, no contact:	7	2
4) theft of men:	7	4
5) contact, no sightings:	6	5
6) theft of children:	5	1
7) medicine fight with bushman:	5	3
8) theft of items from a camp:	5	4
9) killing of bushman:	4	2
10) people befriend bushman:	4	1
11) physical fight with bushman:	4	1
12) sounds in the bush:	3	2
13) man pretends to be bushman in order to seduce women:	3	1
14) women help bushman:	2	2
15) theft of items in cache or net:	2	2
16) women drawn to bushman:	2	2
17) use of bushman image to scare children:	2	2
18) theft of items from bush bivouac:	2	2
19) explanation of a person's antisocial behavior:	1	1

Note: Some narratives contain more than one theme.

the winter). Although most narratives do not specify the time of year directly, it is alluded to by means of a description of the activity being performed: nets are being made, women are picking berries, men are hunting on foot (rather than snowshoes), a beaver hunt is in progress, traps are set for muskrat, and so forth. During the spring, bushmen are variously believed to emerge from their winter underground dwellings, or to return north from their "own country" (*benéne*) far to the south. In the latter instances, as in the fall (when they return south), bushmen may be encountered in groups. The fact that encounters with bushmen are mainly in the spring or in the fall, and that only lone individuals or a small group of women are involved, is not fortuitous, as I will show below.

In the second stage of the narratives, the bushman (who is always a man) makes contact

Table 2. Structure of the narrative of "bushmen" encounters.

Stage I. *Victim is isolated in the bush:*
- a) is left alone by relatives
- b) isolates self from group
- c) seeks adulterous relationships by removing self from a group of the same sex

Stage II. *Bushman initiates relationship with victim by:*
- a) enticement (love medicine, *naidi*)
- b) causing forgetfulness
- c) overcomes victim by a strange, sweet smell
- d) "hanging around" (eluding pursuit, yet remaining close by)

Stage III. *Victim responds by:*
- a) using medicine to conceal self
- b) using medicine to escape
- c) using medicine to kill bushman
- d) no response (has no medicine)
- e) uses medicine to capture bushman

Stage IV. *Consequences:*
- a) victim escapes permanently (men), usually after long absence
- b) victim escapes temporarily (women) but die prematurely
- c) victim remains with bushman forever (children)

with his victim. The methods he uses are invariably those associated with superordinary power or *ʔjk'ǫ́ǫ́,* which he uses negatively for causing harm and eluding pursuit.

In the third stage, the victim responds by using *ʔjk'ǫ́ǫ́* to save himself, by displaying clever foresight that suggests that he possesses *ʔjk'ǫ́ǫ́,* or, if the victim is a young child, acting helplessly, which indicates he does not have *ʔjk'ǫ́ǫ́.* Where power is used by the protagonist (or a close relative who attempts to save him), the narrative not only reveals the fact that specific individuals possess power (something that is usually not mentioned publicly), but also emphasizes the fact that it is being used for positive purposes. In this way the victim or victim's relative (usually a man) is contrasted favorably with the bushman.

Finally, the fourth stage contains a description of the consequences of the conflict between bushman and protagonist. Here, a relationship of cause and effect is sometimes asserted between the bushman as agent and an unhappy event (disappearance of a child, premature death of a young woman, and so forth). In these instances, we see bushman narratives incorporating causal explanations.

To summarize, an examination of the narrative structure of bushman stories indicates that these are complex cultural forms, symbolically rich and functionally diverse. The stories contain causal explanations for disasters in the bush, comment upon the personal identity of the speaker and his relationships with listeners and other members of society, serve in moral instruction, aid in the socialization of children, and educate the listener in the characteristics of bushmen and other environmental phenomena.

causal explanations

As used at Willow Lake, causal explanations for disastrous events fall into four categories. These are *yareidi,* or "spirit animals" ("monsters"); *ʔjk'ǫ́ǫ́ neizǫ̀le',* or "bad power"; *denewi,* or "ghosts"; and *náqǫ̀ne,* or "bushmen." *Yareidi* are giant beings that resemble natural faunal species; they live hidden underground or beneath lakes and rivers and are associated with specific places that are known and named. Many of these places are associated with occurrences during ancestral times when animals and people could assume each other's forms and characteristics, and the world was said to be filled with cannibals. Events resulting in the destruction of these monsters and the "fixing" of human and animal forms in their present shapes, sizes, and ways of behaving are said to have taken place at these sites. Thus, certain places in the Dene habitat are considered sacred for at least two important reasons. First, these places are associated with divine beings, who created order from chaotic situations. Second, they are both reminders and sources of superhuman powers that have ensured Dene existence since the establishment of order in the world. The forms of life that exist at these sites are the sources, it is believed, of intelligent understanding that comes from dreaming in the bush. For ordinary people, they are, in addition, the potential source of general good luck or success that can be achieved for the good of all. Thus, as people pass near them, their behavior demonstrates a particularly intense respect or reverence. Gifts are made to the beings that are said to reside in these places, speech becomes hushed and respectful, and brief prayers for success are made. Furthermore, the lack of such respectful behavior, propitiation even, can cause a disaster at the site. Thus, events of this type that occur at places known to be inhabited by *yareidi* are attributed to this agent. *Yareidi*-caused disasters are relatively rare, however, and typically involve a group of people traveling in a canoe.

"Bad power" can result in a disaster anywhere, both in the bush or in town, and in virtually all places and times. However, it seems to be most plausible as an explanation for in-

cidents involving more than one person in which individuals cause harm to themselves inadvertently. In bush-related disasters attributed to bad power, the victim or victims are never isolated, as with bushman-caused disasters. The element of self-harm is important because it suggests both involuntary compulsion that goes against a person's better judgment or normal habits (that is, someone using bad power has made the victim do something that has placed him in serious danger) and, furthermore, that a victim's actions would have otherwise been entirely benign.

Bad power also serves, perhaps uniquely, as an explanation of disasters that occur in town, again correlated with inadvertent self-harm caused by the victim. The disaster that takes place in town is usually explained as caused by bad power induced by the victim's violation of some social norm, which causes the *ʒik'ǫ́ǫ́* of the perpetrator to turn against the victim. Hatred and revenge seem important as motives. For example, a chronically ill consultant of mine attributed her misery to the fact that she had failed to marry the grandson of a certain old woman. "I went against her dream," she said, "and now she's punishing me for it." Similarly, an incident of starvation was explained as having been caused by the rejection of a woman in marriage—a woman whose father took revenge upon the young man's relatives by causing them to "forget to hunt." As would be expected, bad power serves to explain a greater variety of disasters than any other cause.

The third agent of disaster to be considered is the ghost, *denewí*. Ghosts are simply the souls or shadows of deceased persons who appear to the living most often for the purpose of taking revenge upon a close relative. Ghosts seem to cause harm to those who have violated one or another death bed injunction, such as not to remarry quickly. Like bushman-caused disasters, those attributed to ghosts involve isolated individuals but are not specifically associated with the bush. Finally, ghost encounters involve interaction between known relatives, whereas bushmen encounters are with people who have no prior relationship and are, indeed, anonymous.

In contrast to explanations with bad power as causal, those involving *náqǫ̀ʒne* invariably are associated with disasters in the bush affecting isolated individuals. (Although *náqǫ̀ʒne may come into a bush camp, they only cause minor damage in those instances.*) Yet like bad power, contact with a bushman can itself cause sickness and even death; this is particularly true of menstruating women, who are vulnerable when coming into contact with any man's power.[4] So the *náqǫ̀ʒne* is portrayed as an especially powerful medicine man, both in terms of the consequences that result from contact with him and in terms of particular attributes of his behavior that I discuss below.

To summarize, disasters involving groups of people in the bush and occurring near sites associated with *yareidí* are attributed to those agents; disasters involving solitary individuals in the setting of a town or camp, to ghosts (visible agents) or bad power (invisible); disasters involving more than one person in the bush, to bad power; and those involving a lone person in the bush, to bushmen. In fact, the social and natural settings of the occurrence, not the type of disaster itself, governs the selection of an explanation for these events. Spirit animals, bad power, ghosts, and bushmen serve as explanations for events that in our culture would be defined as "accidents," but for which "accident"—in the sense of an unexpected, coincidental or fortuitous, and unintentional occurrence is an unacceptable and culturally meaningless explanation. Disasters do occur unexpectedly, Dene realize, but never by chance or without the intent of some agent.

characteristics of bushmen as causal agents

I wish now to examine the reasons why *náqǫ̀ʒne* seem to be particularly useful as causal agents in Willow Lake explanations of bush-related disasters. To answer this question, it

will be necessary to consider how the bush itself is conceived, the meaning of social life and social isolation, the characteristics of *nágą̀ne* in general, and an indigenous historical theory that purports to explain their origin.

For members of the Willow Lake group, the contrast between life "in the bush," (*deçîta*), and "in town," (*kǫ̀ta*), is pronounced. "Town" is a setting associated with white people and white-controlled institutions, with tasteless but expensive food from the store, heavy drinking, and enforced idleness. The atmosphere is tense in town, often due to political factionalism manifested in public meetings and settlement council debates and to alcoholism. Most people with the knowledge to survive in the bush spend as little time there as possible.

It is in the bush that Dene concepts of personal identity and even life itself take on full meaning. The bush is the setting in which communication between humans and other living things is most conspicuously enacted. The acquisition of what is called *'ɟk'ǫ́ǫ́*, knowledge about and control over the natural world, by means of which survival is made possible, occurs only in the bush, for it is there that a person dreams and thereby receives this knowledge, these techniques of control, from the forms of life (*yareidí*) in that setting. (*'ɟk'ǫ́ǫ́* can also be acquired from dreams experienced in town, but it does not result in control over the natural environment; as a consequence some medicine men, considered very powerful individuals, are "very poor.") *'ɟk'ǫ́ǫ́* is not an easily interpreted word, although it can be loosely translated as "supernatural power" or "medicine." As power, it can be thought of both as the *source* of a person's capacity for survival in the world and the *strength* or *amount* of control a person has over things in the world. As medicine, it can be thought of as the means by which a hidden esoteric manipulation of empirical phenomena proceeds and thus as esoteric knowledge itself. Here, I use the word in reference to the essence of a person's intelligence—what makes one "understand," but also the substance of intelligent understanding, the knowledge that a person has acquired chiefly, though not exclusively, from dreaming. *'ɟk'ǫ́ǫ́* is therefore best seen, perhaps, as a person's "life" in an experiential rather than vital sense; the latter is governed by the soul. Only by means of bush *'ɟk'ǫ́ǫ́* can bush activities, especially the perpetual search for food and the manufacture of the tools for survival (skin garments, fish nets, canoes, houses, and the like), be safely and successfully undertaken. By extension, social life involving the continual exchange of food, tools, and certain forms of knowledge among people can only occur if some individuals in the group possess and use *'ɟk'ǫ́ǫ́*. The survival of a community in fact depends upon it. Bush medicine men, (*dène'ɟk'ǫ́ǫ́ hèlí*) are persons who remain away from camp for extended periods of time in order to dream, who receive instruction from *lemecíne*,[5] and who are said therefore to "know everything about the world." They are relied upon by the rest of their group to provide substantial amounts of information about the habits of animals, to forecast the weather, and to make decisions about where and how to hunt and when to move camp. Although many men are considered *yedarížei*, "skilled" or "smart" in bush ways, not all have this special knowledge that comes from dreaming about the natural world.

Fear of the bush is attributed by the people at Willow Lake to a lack of *'ɟk'ǫ́ǫ́*, or knowledge about how to deal with the bush. This fear is particularly characteristic, it is said, of people who live most of the time in town, of children who, having spent much of their adolescence away in boarding school, have never dreamt in the bush at this critical time of life, and never were taught the skills necessary for survival by experienced adults. Such young people are said to be unable to stand living in the bush for long periods of time, and the implication is that they are made acutely uncomfortable, even anxious, in that setting. Thus the bushman image, used among the very people who are most capable of surviving away from town, cannot be attributed simply to fear.

The full supply of animal *ʃik'ǫ́ǫ́* "in the world" is at the peak of its strength and, by the same token, most directly accessible to human beings in the spring. It is during the spring when "everything is changing" (*etanedi gǫ̀kę̀*), when "the world swells" (*nadiǫ́ nišei*), and "everything comes to life" (*ariyǫ́ne'daſ ánati*). In March, after months of intense gloom and bitterly cold days in which the temperature frequently falls below −50 degrees, the amount of sunlight begins to increase substantially; by April, numerous days occur with temperatures above freezing. The landscape then begins to change dramatically. The warmth that comes with the return of extensive periods of daylight causes the snow and ice (often several feet thick) to begin melting. Patches of open water appear on the lakes and along the edges of streams, making traveling extremely hazardous. At about this time, thousands of migratory waterfowl return—first, the little green-winged teal (considered the smartest of the birds because it arrives before the others), afterwards the spoonbill, then mallards, gulls and terns, swans, cranes, and geese, followed by an extraordinary variety of ducks. Just as the waterbirds bring new life, so hidden animals (voles, ground squirrels, muskrat, beaver, and bear) appear active once more. As the temperature continues to rise, grass begins to grow and the birch and willow begin to leaf out. Whitefish begin to run in large numbers prior to spawning. With the return of plant life come insects—especially the notorious swarms of mosquitos and black flies. These changes in the environment—the return of life and the increse in *ʃik'ǫ́ǫ́* that is associated with that life—result in an excitement and tension that are likened to both the tensing of muscles and to the mating displays of animals (the same phrase, *daſ legáí'à,* is used to refer to both).

Change, power, tension, and excitement in association create an atmosphere of danger. Although spring is probably the most important time of year because it is then that direct contacts between human beings and the rest of the world are most intense, it also is conceived as the most dangerous time of year because of physical changes in the ice and the return of levels of *ʃik'ǫ́ǫ́* that may be too intense for some people to handle. This is especially true of children, who must be protected by preventing them from sleeping and thereby dreaming in excess. (A young child who dreams too much is in danger of turning into an animal.[6]) The correlation of danger with "difference" induced by change is frequent in Willow Lake metaphor; several words that incorporate the morpheme *guli* ("different") suggest change occurring. For example, the word for stranger is *gulidene,* "different person," for an unknown place, *gulinene,* "different place," for a changing person, *deneguli áánati,* and for a place made dangerous by the presence of *yareidí, nęguli ǫ̀nte'e,* "here are acts of change, animate things moving."

It is not surprising then, that the bushmen should appear in the spring. The bushman is the very embodiment of spring, a solitary stranger of unpredictable but typically dangerous habits who is in command of extraordinary *ʃik'ǫ́ǫ́,* a kind of bush medicine man in the extreme.

As I noted in connection with bad power explanations earlier, signs of the bushman's extraordinary power in stories from Willow Lake and other Northern Athapaskan groups make this being seem identical to a medicine man. Both bushmen and medicine men share a variety of attributes; for example, (1) they cannot be killed with a gun; (2) they can change into animals; (3) they move "like a rocket"; (4) they can travel underground; (5) they can create strong winds; (6) they have superhuman strength; (7) they can lift up water to travel on the bottom of deep lakes; (8) they create confusion by making people "go crazy"; (9) they cause dogs not to bark; (10) they see people even where they are hidden, or despite their being located many miles away; and finally, (11) they "move in one day" extremely long distances.

Bushmen are without question *dène* or "human beings" rather than the "devils," "spirits," "monsters," or "demons" they have usually been interpreted to be. That they are

human is demonstrated most explicitly by the fact that it is said to be very bad for one's soul to kill them, just as it is to kill any other person. Although this is a pious response that is now current among the Roman Catholics of Willow Lake, descriptions of certain precautionary practices that are not followed today suggest that it was always dangerous to take a human life—that of a bushman not excepted.

The fact that they are conceived as human helps to explain a certain ambiguity in the reactions of some people to bushmen. In narratives, protagonists often express repulsion and loathing—but also occasionally pity, when coming face to face with these persons.[7] This is because, although they are *dène* in the broad sense, they are not *dène* in the more restricted sense of social persons, "the people." On the contrary, bushmen are morally deficient individuals whose activities stand in decided contrast to those of members of society. The bushman is portrayed as a lone man who has no relations of his own and therefore must steal men, women, and children—but most often women—to help him survive in the bush. Whereas the bushman is insensitive and the cause of human suffering, *dène* respond with sympathy, love, and generosity to other human beings. Bushmen exploit, steal, hurt, and act treacherously. They shun the company of "the people" and never respond to acts of hospitality; they steal unnecessarily, for example, although they would be offered help if they but only ask for it. *Dène*, on the other hand, assemble together in groups in which they participate actively in exchange. They are, in other words, not only willing to give, but to receive. In contrast, *nâqâne* are perceived to be antisocial and therefore to be regarded with suspicion.

Bushmen are often depicted as grotesque in appearance, the consequence of living outside of society—especially without women. Emaciated as a result of a marginal diet, they are sometimes said to wear ragged clothing, hard-soled shoes made from untanned hides, or rubber boots of a type not currently available in local Hudson's Bay stores. A man's wife helps him make the most efficient use of the animals he has killed by processing the meat into *'iegǫ́ǫ́*, or "dry meat," which can be preserved for long periods of time. A bushman without women must therefore necessarily waste substantial portions of his kills, hence the state of semistarvation in which he is always said to be found. Also, a woman gives "good luck" (success) to a man by supplying him with finely made moose and caribou hide moccasins, gloves, and a gun case, which are said to help the hunter to track and kill animals successfully (hence one motive for stealing women). Although a man can survive alone by means of his own power, he will only live marginally without a wife. Furthermore, as a man outside of society, he does not have the benefits available to him of *dène 'atǰgolǰ*, extremely knowledgeable persons who share their technological experience and expertise with others of their group, nor of "lucky women" (*ceku becǫ́náridí*—"woman, to her things are coming"), those who have the ability to draw game to hunters and to correct the deficiencies of guns, canoes, traps, and the like.

Bushmen appear dirty and unkempt because, not only do they have no one for whom to groom themselves (no women take pleasure in their appearance), but there is no one to groom them (only close relatives can cut and dress a man's hair, for example).

These physical attributes of bushmen suggest that they participate in abnormal relations with the women they steal. Not only do they steal rather than marry them, they never enter truly social relations with women. Their ties to women are exploitative, technological, and sexual ones, rather than relationships characterized by the affectionate and mutually beneficial exchange of services and the creation of progeny.

Bushmen are regarded as pitiable because they are associated with starvation, alleged to be the cause of their initial isolation in many stories. In the central and northern areas, bushmen are in fact frequently described as the pathetic lone survivors of incidents of starvation. Narratives of the discovery of long-lost persons in the bush indicate that such lone

survivors were initially treated with avoidance and fear by their rescuers, because they were thought to have "gone crazy" and to be violent and unpredictable, to have lost all sense of morality, having probably (it was thought) engaged in cannibalism. (Multiple acts of cannibalism were well-known from this region during periods of starvation; it was apparently always men who ended up killing their wives and children for this purpose.) As Slobodin suggests for the Kutchin, fear of the lone survivor and fear of the bushman are both linked to knowledge of the consequences ("going crazy") of extreme social isolation (Slobodin 1960).

Bushmen, then, are persons who have become dehumanized by their isolation. Their antisocial behavior is seen as an inevitable product of their solitary existence.[8] But because they are still in essence human, there is occasionally a possibility that they may be rehabilitated—both morally and physically. Once in a while a bushman is captured and, despite himself, forcefully persuaded to return to a normal existence by being treated with exceptional kindness by persons living in society. Several Ingalik narratives (Osgood 1959) describe the bushmen as bizarre creatures that turn out to be women who had acquired masculine features (perhaps because of their continual and intensive use of power in hunting). Upon being rescued and treated with great care by members of a band who had discovered them in the winter, living in subterranean houses, they reverted to their female nature and ultimately fully reincorporated themselves into society by marrying their rescuers.

To summarize what I have said so far, the bushman is a pathetic but horrible image, a man who has lost all the positive attributes of social persons. He not only behaves reprehensibly by causing suffering, but also he cannot perform the most basic acts of "decent" (that is, moral) social intercourse; he screams in rage rather than speaks, grabs food rather than waits to receive it, and shuns the invitation of hunters to warm himself and drink hot tea by a fire, a simple but basic gesture of hospitality. Furthermore, he is physically loathsome—he "looks awful," as a consequence of not caring for his person. So the bushman not only does not respect other people but also lacks respect for himself. Needless to say, all these characteristics are the antitheses of good behavior, good appearance, and a good moral sense—attributes of *dène'edetere'ine'*, the supremely virtuous person.

The bushman image thus suggests to people how terrible they may appear to others when they act badly; such behavior may cause them to appear to be bushmen. Thus the bushman is a negative model that vividly reinforces the morality of bush norms. By linking ostensibly purely practical technological acts and procedures to moral standards, it makes people think of these acts as virtuous behavior, as that which conforms to the basic values of Dene culture. Yet the stories are more than Malinowskian social charters.

As I noted, bushman narratives typically describe personal experiences, usually those of known ordinary individuals. The bushman is not some esoteric supernatural revealing himself to only an unfavored few. Although far from an ordinary person, the bushman is someone who, like a wolf, bear, or moose, can be encountered by anyone in the bush. Thus, the encounter with a bushman is presented as an infrequent but not extraordinary event in the world of normal experience.

The narratives tell people not only what has happened to friends and relatives in the past, but that something equally distressing (and of identical cause) can happen to them and to their children in the present. They suggest as well the responses appropriate to these crises and justify unusual or at least nonordinary behavior (especially, the public use of power) in such situations. These activities serve as models against which the observant listener can measure his own preparation for such events. A person who is afraid of bushmen can learn how to cope with them should the need arise. In addition, because the

stories propose explanations of both events (certain kinds of disasters) and human behavior (for example, the exceptional display of power, violence, or confusion in the bush), they serve as models for explaining future situations of like characteristics.

Finally, as I noted earlier, the bushman narrative suggests to people the consequences of becoming isolated in the bush, of surviving a dreadful period of starvation, of succumbing to temptations that lead to the violations of social standards and thus to depravity or, indeed, eventually to dehumanization. To put it simply, the bushman image is horrifying because it vividly illuminates the consequences of human frailty—both physical and moral. Not only those who have met with danger in the bush and who have come close to starvation, but every person who has experienced hardship and felt fear as a consequence of living in the bush can find meaning in the bushman symbol. And finally, for those who find themselves unable to resist violating the moral code, the bushman image may be both a convenient and plausible one to emulate but one that serves at the same time as an ominous warning of reprisal.

bushmen and history

The content of bushmen narratives suggests the presence of ethnohistorical models that are concerned with events typifying changes in relationships among different Northern Athapaskan groups and between Indians and Europeans.

Within three geographically distinguishable sets of Northern Athapaskan groups (see Table 3), there seems to be an apparently consistent variation in how bushmen are conceived. These differences are suggested by four types of evidence: (1) words for bushmen; (2) characteristics of bushmen as they are portrayed in stories; (3) ways of identifying bushmen with social units; and (4) stated means of reacting appropriately when in a bushman's presence.

Among most of the southern Northern Athapaskans (including the Kaska, Tahltan, southern-most Slave, Sekani, and Chipewyan; data are missing for Carrier, Chilcotin, and Beaver[9]), the word for bushman (*ena* or *enda*) is also used to refer to an enemy. In cases in

Table 3. Distribution of bushman concepts.

Tribe	*Source*	*Athapaskan term*	*Author's translation*	*Ellen Basso's translation*
1. Ingalik	Osgood 1959	*non.o'an*	"from when you see something"; "bushman"	
2. Koyukuk (Ten'a)	Chapman 1939(?) Jette 1911	none given	"brushman"; "bushman"	
	Clark 1970	*tson-te-rotana*	"people among the rocks"	"living among rocks"
		nigenl-en-a	"woodsman"	"moves into hiding"
3. Kutchin	Petitot 1876	*nana"i*	"ennemi"	"always at a distance"
a) Peel River or "Loucheux"	Osgood 1936b	*na i*	"man who hides himself"	"out of sight"
	Slobodin 1960	*nana.i*	"bushman"	"always at a distance"
b) Old Crow, "Vunta" or "Rat Indians"	Keim 1964	none given	"brushman"	

Table 3. continued.

Tribe	*Source*	*Athapaskan term*	*Author's translation*	*Ellen Basso's translation*
c) Crow River Chandalar River	Osgood 1936	*na'in*		"out of sight"
4. Hare	Petitot 1876	*nak'ane*	"ennemi"	"one who moves into disappearance"
	Savishinsky 1974	*lariyi*^{n}	"bushman"	"hands are rising upwards"
5. Upper Tanana	McKennan 1959	*natze'an dluth'shin*		"starving person"
	VanStone 1974	*nakhani*		"one who moves into disappearance"
6. Tanaina	Osgood 1937	*nandina*	"bushman"	
	Osgood 1933	*natina*	"bushman"	
7. Han	Osgood 1971	*na ai*	"Bad Indian"	"out of sight"
8. Mountain	E. Basso, fieldnotes	*nâqąne*	(when using English, consultants say "bushman," "spy," or "hidden person")	"one who moves into disappearance"
9. Willow Lake	E. Basso, fieldnotes	*nâqąne*	(see above)	"one who moves into disappearance"
10. Bear Lake	Osgood 1932	*nakani*	"Bad Indian"	"one who moves into disappearance"
	Rushforth n.d.	*bitsi*	"his badness"	"his badness"
11. Slave				
a) Ft. Simpson(?)	MacNeish 1957	*naka*^{n}	"Spy"	"one who moves into disappearance"
b) Ft. Nelson	Honigmann 1946	*nakani*	"bushman"	"one who moves into disappearance"
c) "Slave"	Mason 1946	none given	"Bad Indian"	
12. Dogrib	Helm 1972	*nahga*	"bushman"	"one who moves into disappearance"
13. Southern Tutchone	McClellan 1974	*'ana'i*^{n}	"he hides away"	
14. Tagish	McClellan 1974	*nanE'i*	"he hides away"	
15. Northern Tutchone	Legros n.d.	none given		
16. Kaska	Honigmann 1954	*nahanni*	(name for Northern or Mountain People)	"far away person"
		nakani	identified with Cree and/or Tahltan; there is also a separate word (*teciina*) for Cree	"one who moves into disappearance"
17. Tahltan	Jenness 1937	*dishinni*	Cree	
18. Sekani	Jenness, 1937	*dishinni*	Cree	
19. Chipewyan				
a) Churchill River	Birket-Smith 1930	*en'a-Eline*	"the wicked enemies"	"enemy . . .?"
b) Snowdrift	VanStone 1965	none given		
c) Ft.Resolution	Smith 1973	*enna*	"enemy"; "Cree"	"enemy"
20. Carrier	Morice 1897	*ntsi.en*	"the Bad One"; "devil"	"his badness"
21. Chilcotin	Morice 1897	none given	"hommes des bois"	

Groups for which there are no reported data on bushman: Eyak, Ahtna, Beaver, Holikachuk, Upper Kuskokwim.

which a separate word is used for bushman, he is identified explicitly with enemy tribes, especially the Cree or an Athapaskan tribe with whom these southern peoples were in actual conflict. *Ena* were never considered to belong to one's own tribe, however, and were killed immediately, if possible, when encountered.

Further north, among a large group of peoples including the southern Alaskan Athapaskans classed as Taniana, Han, Southern Tutchone, Northern Tutchone, and Tagish, as well as the Canadian Mountain, Willow Lake, Bear Lake, northern Slave, and Dogrib, bushmen are referred to by words that suggest their elusive, mysterious character, but a separate term is used to refer to an enemy. Among many of these groups, bushmen are described as members of more southerly tribes, but rather than being simply enemies, they are thought to be the survivors of incidents of revenge warfare, or starvation, among those same groups. Although the bushman today is not believed to be especially warlike, he is dangerous because of his theft of people. Encounters with bushmen in this central region are marked by the use of *ʒik'ǫǫ* for the purpose of making them release their victims or to leave an area, rather than to kill them. Accounts of the killing of bushmen are very rare and occur only when the marauder is trying to kill people, either directly (through shooting) or by preventing them from leaving camp in order to hunt.

Finally, in the extreme north of Athapaskan territory, among the Ingalik, Koyukuk, Kutchin, Hare, and Upper Tanana, the bushman is considered a person who has become isolated from his own local group, usually because of starvation. Bushmen in the north do not come from a foreign tribe. Here, they are sometimes considered harmless and were usually only killed if they were known to have preyed cannibalistically on a particular band. This area is in fact the only one in which bushmen are (occasionally) described as cannibals. Finally, in this area, bushmen are frequently reincorporated into society. Words for bushmen in the north emphasize the "hidden" and starving nature of this being and do not evoke violence or predation.

These variations can be linked tentatively to differences in the postcontact history of Northern Athapaskans and to the major crises that they endured between the late eighteenth and early twentieth centuries. The bushman is asserted to be a relatively recent phenomenon, rather than a being present from earliest times. This suggests that the image may have had its origin in the dramatic and often horrible consequences of contact (direct or indirect) with Europeans.

Conflicts between the southernmost Northern Athapaskans and the Cree and between the Athapaskans themselves in the early decades of the fur trade took on the character of territorial competition. Initially, the most intensive warfare was between the Cree and the Slave during 1775–1777, when the Cree, newly armed with muzzle loaders from fur traders and pressured by northward-moving Ojibwa and intrusive Chipewyan (Bishop 1976:44; Gillespie 1970), forced the Slave up the Slave River from the Lake Athapaska region into the area west of Great Slave Lake (Helm 1966:79; Morris 1973:58). The Slave in turn seem to have begun fighting the Chipewyan (to the east) and the Kaska (to the west), as well as each other. At the same time, the most westerly groups—the Kaska, Tahltan, and Sekani—were engaged in fighting among themselves and, to a lesser extent, with persons they identified as Cree. The Chipewyan began a major period of aggression with the Dogrib, which only ended around 1832 (Helm 1972:54). It is perhaps because of this close association of bushman with enemy that among the Chipewyan and Kaska, at least, young people question their existence at the present time.

In the central region, including the mountains of central Alaska, northern Yukon, and the western Northwest Territories, as well as the central Mackenzie River valley (including the northwestern perimeter of Great Bear Lake), warfare also occurred but seems to have been blood feuding or vendetta hostilities. Although these disputes were certainly as disastrous

to local groups as was warfare in the south, they occurred between known individuals, often close relatives. Many consultants in the central Mackenzie area recognize these hostilities to have begun in disputes over women, an interpretation suggested as well by McKennen (1959:95–96), MacNeish (1957), and Petitot (1876).

Epidemics of smallpox, measles, scarlet fever, and syphilis ravaged the central Northern Athapaskans in the period roughly between the 1840s and the late 1880s. Such diseases would have left many women infertile or sterile as well as complicated childbirth for those remaining capable of conception. For example, Morris[10] estimates that during this period two-thirds of all women at Great Bear Lake died before reaching forty years of age (1973). By the 1870s, Petitot noted that men had begun to show a marked preference for older women as wives, because they were thought to be better capable of bearing live children and of surviving the rigors of life generally than were younger, "unproved" women. Some of these older women were undoubtedly scarce and hard to keep.

In the extreme north, a different, although related, picture appears. Although most of these groups occasionally fought with Eskimo (in the case of Hare), Chipewyan, and sometimes among themselves, the major threats to their existence well into the twentieth century seem to have been starvation caused by the failure of critical animal populations—especially caribou and rabbits. As with the central groups, these incidents were aggravated by epidemics, which seem, however, to have been considerably more localized.

It is possible, therefore, to propose a correlation between the variation in bushmen concepts in these three areas and variation in the types of crises these groups have had to face since contact. In each case, experience has served to reinforce a particular aspect of the bushman as an expressive and explanatory symbol. In the south he is an enemy; in the central region, a half-starved member of a neighboring or foreign group who steals (but rarely kills) people, and in the north, he is a survivor from a local group that died of starvation. At the same time, homogeneity of bushman concepts is preserved. They are everywhere lone men who appear in the spring using extraordinary power to prey upon human beings. Inevitably the bushmen lead a marginal existence because they are outside of society.

It would be wrong, however, to interpret the bushman concept as a vestigial one, as merely a reflection of the sufferings of the last century. On the contrary, at Willow Lake (and elsewhere in Northern Athapaskan territory) bushmen are even today a topic of intense interest. Far from being thought of as an experience that only the "oldtimers" had, many people today claim to have had personal encounters with bushmen. Yet as a consequence of increasingly more frequent and intensive contacts with both whites and Indians of other tribes, there seems to be a developing skepticism about bushmen, particularly among people who have traveled extensively and who have had an opportunity to discuss them with outsiders. Rather than totally rejecting the idea of bushmen existing at all (as do some Chipewyan, for example), people at Willow Lake suggest explanations for why they persist, which may be modern alternatives to the theory that they are the survivors of starvation and war. First, it is thought possible that bushmen are members of southerly tribes—powerful but "crazy" medicine men who move north to practice their nefarious skills. One man thought that a story he had heard from a Blackfoot at Charles Camsell Hospital in Edmonton, Alberta, confirmed this; in the story, a fellow patient described how his father (a medicine man) had moved north with many horses in the previous spring. Because at that time of year the Slave residents of Fort Simpson, on the Mackenzie River, had seen tracks of many bushmen (and with horses as well!), this was judged confirming evidence of their southerly origin.

A second interpretation, also supported by recent experiences, is that bushmen are escaped prisoners, or other whites who have intruded into Northern Athapaskan territory. For example, in 1973 an American who had escaped from a prison in Edmonton was cap-

tured after he unexpectedly emerged from the bush—half starved and unshaven—during a forest fire. Finally, bushmen are sometimes called "spies," a term that was most likely introduced during World War II (when U.S. Army personnel built the Canol Road across the Mackenzie Mountains) and again during the Cold War, when Dew Line Construction took place.

Third, a person who is unknown, isolated, and seen to behave antisocially (especially stealing food and lurking at the edge of a settlement) is typically designated bushman until he is otherwise identified. In 1975, for example, a story circulated along the Central Mackenzie about a bushman stealing fish from drying racks in one of the towns. Later, the bushman was discovered to be a white man, but one whose presence in the area had not yet been accounted for. Remaining anonymous, he was still thought of as a bushman.

The Royal Canadian Mounted Police have on occasion been asked to search for bushmen after an alleged sighting. Although they have failed in every instance to find anyone, this only serves to illustrate another important characteristic of the contemporary bushman—that he is able to live elusively in the bush within white-controlled areas and despite white men's sophisticated searching techniques (helicopters, for example). Bushmen have now possibly become a symbol of the past, somewhat idealized life, when Dene were able to survive in the bush independently of white men's equipment and food. I say somewhat idealized because this image is definitely an ambiguous one—not a noble savage at all—and because the life of isolated "oldtimers" is recognized to have been harsh in the extreme.

conclusion

The bushman is an important element in Northern Athapaskan historical description and explanation, and, as I have shown, is especially significant as a vehicle for expressing the legitimacy of certain kinds of human behavior. The bushman is a complex symbol constructed from the core elements of the most important domains of meaning in Dene culture. The use of this symbol highlights the various and sometimes conflicting conceptions that are incorporated into definitions of the categories "human being," "male person," "medicine man," and "social (or *dene*) person." The symbol brings to the foreground, or marks, these meanings by condensing them into an ambiguous human image. Thus, the concept is flexible, or multifunctional, and its use in narratives emphasizes more than one of these meanings at the same time; similarly, different meanings are used in different narrative contexts. Where the image does not carry this semantic load, its utility as a symbol (as among the Chipewyan, for example) is lessened. In these cases it seems to have lost significance as the historical situation out of which it emerged changed. This is precisely because ambiguity is less prominent, and, thus, symbolic flexibility is lacking.

The bushman image might be seen as a transcendent symbol in that it provides a connection between disparate cultural domains by incorporating and linking together concepts of power: the nature of seasonality; the relations between humans and other living things, between men and women, and people of different bands; the perceptions of technology; the experiences of starvation and war, and of contact with white society. Highly successful as a device for illustrating changing perceptions of self and society and of the source and nature of moral virtues, it has persisted through almost two centuries of social and cultural upheaval (to say nothing of repeated skepticism and outright ridicule by whites) to survive and even flourish in the Northern Athapaskan regions of Canada and Alaska.

notes

[1] "Bushman" is the word commonly used by English speakers (including whites). Although these beings are conceived as living in the "bush," they symbolize other qualities that are marked by the Athapaskan lexemes (see Table 3).

[2] I wish to thank the people of Fort Norman, Northwest Territories, Canada, especially the families living at Willow (Brackett) Lake for allowing me to live among them and learn about their way of life. Those to whom I am particularly indebted are anonymous here only at their request to remain so. The research upon which this paper is based occurred at various times between 1970 and 1976. I am grateful to the American Council of Learned Societies, National Museum of Man Urgent Ethnology Research Program, and the University of Arizona for their generous support. I wish to thank James Fernandez, Victor Turner, David Sapir, Hildred Geertz, Dell Hymes, Jerrold E. Levy, Robert M. Netting, E. Scott Rushforth, and especially Keith H. Basso for their critical comments and suggestions on earlier drafts of this paper. My thanks are also due Dolores Chavez for her assistance with the research at Firestone Library, Princeton University.

[3] There is some question concerning the linguistic status of this community. *K'áálǫ*, is rarely mentioned in the literature on the central Mackenzie. Its residents have been variously classed as "Hare" (Petitot 1876), "Mountain" (Petitot 1891), or "Slave" (Osgood 1932, 1936a; Morris 1973), although the speech of those who consider themselves members by birth (rather than marriage) differs from these Northern Athapaskan dialects. Preliminary research suggests that the *k'áálǫ* dialect is closest to (but not identical with) Mountain and Bear Lake.

For the last hundred years at least, a discrete group have considered themselves *k'áálǫgotineke* ("those living in relation to willow tips"), exploiting the region between Willow, Kelly, and Mahoney Lakes and trading out of Fort Norman. A paper on the present sociolinguistic status of the community is in preparation.

[4] Contact with *náqane* can be harmful as well because the victim may suffer from intense fear, *dadzidive*, that results in soul loss.

[5] The word *lemecine'* is used to refer to the specific physical or experiential manifestations of a person's power—visible only to him: the best translation of this would thus be "spirit guardian."

[6] There is, in fact, an appropriate period in the life cycle, after childhood but prior to sexual experience, during which dreaming is regarded positively. Dreaming after marriage is conceived to be potentially dangerous, insofar as it signals future disasters to the self or family of the dreamer.

[7] Some people, however, are incapable of feeling pity for them because of the loss of a child or near starvation caused by bushmen.

[8] Several stories collected at Willow Lake describe the experiences of captives who were taken to bushmen society far to the south of Dene territory. These narratives, insofar as they contain any information about bushmen society, make no distinctions between the latter and Dene society, nor do they suggest that the behavior of bushmen in their own society differs from that of *dene*.

[9] The Sarcee, a Northern Athapaskan tribe of characteristically Plains Culture, are apparently the only group who did not conceive of bushmen.

[10] Morris's analysis (based on comments by Petitot) was confirmed by consultants at Willow Lake, although they denied female infanticide had ever occurred.

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